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Technical education plan meets hostility

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Reform without tears

Samuel Beer's Britain against Itself (reviewed by Nevil Johnson on page 15) has already achieved a fashionable reputation in academico-political society. Professor Beer's thesis in broad terms is that the benign "collectivist polity" of the 1960s, an economy managed along proper Keynesian lines and a society civilized by the postwar welfare state, has been superseded by malignant "pluralistic stagnation" in the 1980s when politicians by weakly trying to appease over-mighty special interests have produced an impoverishment of public choice. Clearly this has substantial appeal as a description of what has gone wrong in Britain. The danger is that this interest may be evidence not of genuine reflection and introspection, which could be the start of a cure, but of a narcissism, which is part of the disease.

This is not the place to discuss Professor Beer's book. However, it may be interesting to examine, perhaps to deconstruct, the reasons why so many find his, much simplified, interpretation so alluring. The view of the past and present which this interpretation supports can be described, only a little unfairly, as liberalism without tears or for those a little further to the left radicalism without tears. In the particular case of higher education the appropriate formula might be Robbins without tears or Crosland without tears. A central characteristic of this view is a strong belief in consensus. For only through an imagined consensus can the abrasiveness of any radical or even liberal policy worthy of the adjective be smoothed away. The only alternative, to accept that all reform is fiercely contested by the privileged interests it seeks to modify or replace, is unattractive not only because it demands a less harmonious description of society but because it also requires the advocates of change to show a political courage in its pursuit and intellectual rigour in the definition of its costs and purposes that can be very uncomfortable. Once the need for such consensus has been established, it then becomes necessary to place a high pri-

ority on the preservation of that assumed consensus. So reform must be achieved as painlessly as possible, which in turn can lead to a degree of political dishonesty. Robbins universities, Seebohm social services, Plowden primary schools and a booming "youth culture" economy, holidays in Majorca, and wall-to-wall central heating as well - there is no longer any need to choose! The danger, of course, is that when choices can no longer be delayed, choices are made and not always those approved by sickly liberals - or, worse still, that these same liberals are afflicted by doubt about the value of reform when they are asked to pay its proper price rather than having them provided on tick, which has been their dilemma since the end of post-war prosperity in the mid-1970s. Perhaps for this very reason - and here Professor Beer's analysis rings very true - the foundations of the welfare state laid down in the 1940s have proved more durable than the superstructure erected in the 1960s. For they reflected political and social values about which there was a very high degree of public consciousness, which is not at all the same as consensus, that was based on the three-fold experience of alienation in the 1930s, solidarity during the war, and the austerity of postwar reconstruction. Perhaps it was because difficult choices had to be made that those choices stuck. In the 1960s it was very different. Reforms based on half-made choices seemed to lack the same solidity.

If this analysis has any validity, its implications for higher education are not encouraging. For our present system of universities, polytechnics and colleges is very much a product of the 1960s, and so may have been infected by its evasive spirit. There is a danger that because the Robbins expansion attracted so little effective opposition the universities may have accepted their present, much expanded role painlessly, absent-mindedly, and so unconsciously. A good fight after all concentrates the mind and strengthens commitment. Perhaps too little radical rethinking accompanied the expansion of the

Mr Tebbit's worker-pupils

Many people who have welcomed the various initiatives of the Manpower Services Commission for school-leavers, and especially for the young unemployed, will feel much more ambivalent about its planned intervention in the education of young people still at school. The MSC has been asked by Mr Tebbit to develop pilot schemes for education and training packages, including work experience, for 14 to 18-year-olds. Mr Tebbit hopes that if such schemes prove successful these packages will become a regular option. This approach has received the public endorsement of the Prime Minister.

One, possibly cynical, reaction is to like the money and worry about the consequences later. For although the MSC is to be given no extra money for the pilot schemes, clearly the chosen local authorities and schools will receive useful extra resources at a time when the conventional education budget is being squeezed. An opposite reaction is to denounce the whole idea as a plan to create battalions of industrial or office helots; or, only a little more moderately, to submit the principle of comprehensive secondary education for all by trying to reproduce in a disguised form the old division into grammar schools and secondary modern and technical schools. In fact the attempt to integrate education, training and work has an important pedigree. It may be little comfort to Mr Tebbit but his new scheme has more than an echo of the polytechnical schools established by Lunacharsky in the first years after the Russian Revolution. The plan therefore should be judged on its own merits, its aim, to borrow the words of the Department of Employment, is to stimulate technical and vocational education to 14 and 18-year-olds in order to improve their performance in the development of new skills and technology. Does this make sense? Will more closely focused vocational courses for pupils in the last two years of compulsory schooling help to achieve this objective, a reader acceptance and better use of new technologies? Pupils will probably make their points in their answer to this question. First, they will point out that the Government's new initiative seems to discount what is already being done, for example, the many "links" courses between schools and further education which are designed for this very age group. Many would argue that such graduate development programmes, pragmatically based on the identified needs of young people and operating within the recognized structure of the local authority education system, offer a better path to follow than a national initiative very much trapped by political and bureaucratic ambitions.

Second, they will argue that the Government's cure is based on a false diagnosis of the disease. More able pupils are unlikely to be attracted by the MSC package in their fourth and fifth years. This option is much more likely to be taken up by Sir Keith's "bottom 40 per cent". So it is unlikely to have much impact on the education of not only those who go on to higher education but those who enter traditional further education, in short all those who will later form the professional and technical cadres of society. As for those who are attracted by, or directed towards, the MSC package, the replacement of a "diluted" academic curriculum by a supposedly instrumental training package will be of little benefit.

If there is one lesson to be drawn from the progress of new technologies, it is that interestingly, a high premium will be placed on flexibility and adaptability of skills. But such good general education (which should be the solid foundations of a broad general education) which 14-year-olds would receive in an impoverished education which left them with inadequate skills to achieve the social autonomy that is their right, and the economic adaptability that is their duty, and safeguard, as workers.

Laurie Taylor



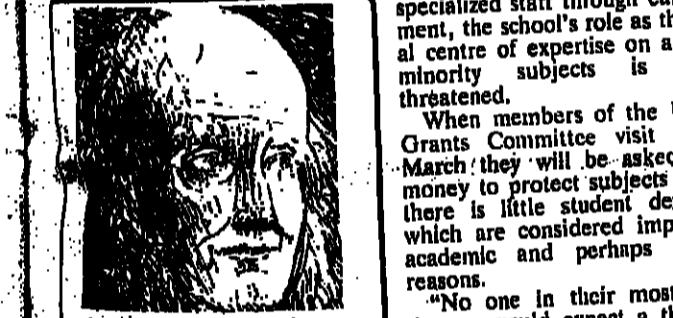
Ah, Professor Bewley! Professor Hampton! How nice to see you. How are you? Remarkably well, thank you, Professor Bewley. In the pink in fact. Why, look who's here! It's Professor Apsley. Professor Apsley. How are you keeping? Why Professor Hampton! And Professor Bewley! In excellent health, thank you, gentlemen. How very good to see you. And you? Are you well? Yes indeed Professor Apsley. Fighting fit. I was just saying to Professor Bewley... Just a minute. Isn't that Professor Woburn coming towards you? You know Professor Hampton, I believe you're right, Professor Woburn. Over here. Yes, over here. How are you, my dear old fellow? Good afternoon gentlemen. Why Professor Hampton! And Professor Apsley! And Professor Bewley! How very pleasant.

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Whitehall plan to rescue rare subjects

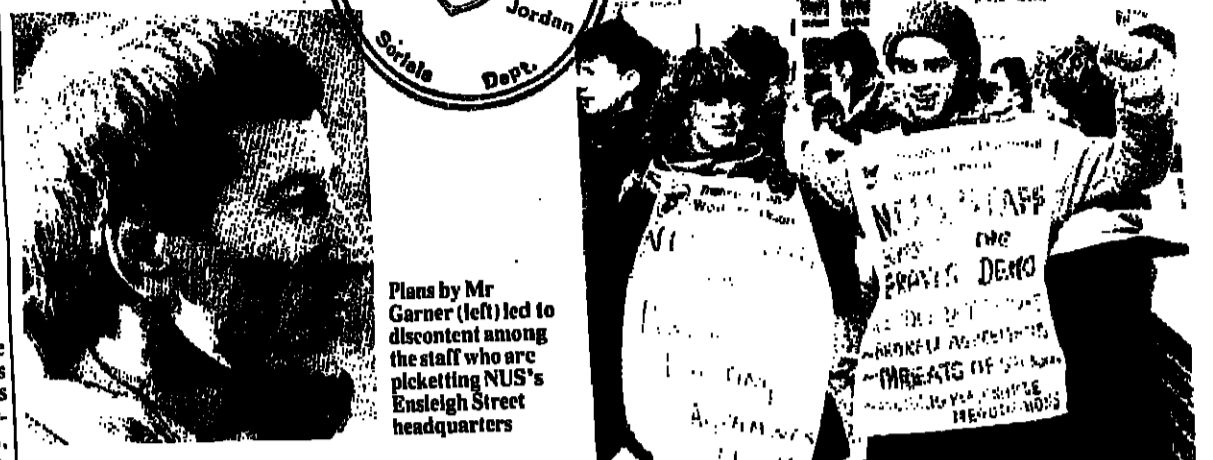
by Sandra Hempel
The Department of Education and Science is considering setting up a special inquiry into the teaching of minority regional subjects such as Asian, African, Slavonic and Oriental studies. The outcome might be a reorganisation that such subjects should be more concentrated in a small number of centres of excellence such as the School of Oriental and African Studies and the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, both in London.



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DES fails in bid to close university departments

by John O'Leary
Civil servants pressed unsuccessfully for the closure of at least two university departments of education as the last phase of this year's teaching cuts was finalised this week. The second time during the University Grants Committee's deliberations on the cuts that the education sub-committee has come into conflict with the Department of Education and Science. During the summer, it resisted direction from DES on the detailed allocation of teaching experience. It did not meet the Government's targets for both primary and secondary training and required only relatively minor modifications at this year's meeting. The universities will close 1,000 places through the cuts, but most are already near the numbers required because of temporary measures imposed two years ago. The DES favours the closure of small departments and considers at least 200 to be below its minimum numbers.



NUS conference plans go on despite dispute

by David Jobbins
Student union leaders this week pressed ahead with last-minute preparations for next week's conference although it could worsen the dispute with their 70 staff. National Union of Students employees went on strike 10 days ago in protest as the way the management was implementing changes in the headquarters telephone and reception service. The intervention earlier of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service failed to pave the way for return to work but fresh moves were under way as THESE went to press. The executive and senior management and prepared to put the final touches to arrangements for the three-day conference if the staff do not go back. Accommodation has already been found and only details remain, they say. The dispute blew up over plans by the management and chief executive Mr John Garner to introduce new working arrangements for headquarters telephonists and receptionists.



Although the employers later withdrew an instruction to staff to implement the new arrangements pending talks, the staff were this week refusing to return to work until a number of key issues were conceded. Although nine colleges walked out of last weekend's Scottish NUS council in support of the staff, more than 20 remained, and the executive is said to be regarding a vote backing them as an expression of support. The staff belong to the white-collar section of the transport workers' union, National Union of Journalists, members working on National Student are also being backed by their union. It seems likely that National Student will not appear again until the new year, losing £10,000 of advertising. Education cuts and grants are to be the key issues at conference, with considerable anger expected over the Government's decision to hold the increase grants to 4 per cent for the second year running. The Government had a comfortable majority of 52 at the end of the Commons debate on the order increasing the 1982-83 awards by 4 per cent. Opposition parties had forced the debate. During the debate Sir William van der Stoep, chairman of the Conservative backbench education committee, put his opposition to loans firmly on the record and expressed dissatisfaction with the level of increase for 1982-83. Labour spokesman Mr Phillip Whitehead said students had been cheated and Liberal leader Mr David Steel, rector of Edinburgh University, accused ministers of "quite blatantly" going back on an undertaking that the level of grants would be reviewed if these costs rose faster than other prices. The disappearing demo, page 4

FE ripe for job-sharing

by Olga Wojtas
Tertiary education is a particularly suitable area for job sharing, a conference in Glasgow heard last week. Delegates at the conference organized by the Scottish Job Sharing Planning Group said that continuity between students and lecturers could be maintained, particularly with further education day release classes. And Mr Roy Pilkington, assistant education officer of Sheffield said he hoped to have an agreement on job sharing with the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education by the end of the year, with a percentage limit on the number of jobs which could be shared. Mr Pilkington said later that job sharing was certainly not something we are promoting aggressively, and we are opposed to anything which undermines full-time posts or security of tenure. But we will look at individual cases on their merits. Sheffield has already pioneered a job sharing scheme in schools, despite opposition, to help create jobs for newly trained and mature teachers, said Mr Pilkington. Mr Les Fulton of the Educational Institute of Scotland's national executive said his union could not contemplate the risk that job sharing would erode full time school posts. The union is advising its members to refuse invitations from Aston to act as external examiners or visiting lecturers if the university presses on with compulsory redundancies. Professor Crawford has said individual staff will not be selected for redundancy before council meets on December 14. The meeting is to be jobbed by AUT members from all over the country. Other steps being taken by the union include legal action to force disclosure of financial information which the union says may prove that the picture is not so bleak as the vice chancellor has painted. In the ballot, one member of council asked for his abstention to be recorded and another failed to vote, leading the AUT to argue that a majority of council had not voted for the action sought by the vice chancellor. Mr Laurie Sapper, general secretary of the AUT, said that repeated efforts to discuss the issue with Professor Crawford had failed. The national universities committee of the National and Local Government Officers Association has expressed its support for the AUT action. Professor Crawford, giving one objective as "to maximise student choice" said: "The degree of programme reduction need not equal that of course reduction forced on us by continued on page 3

Crawford forges ahead with changes at Aston

A plan for wide-ranging academic reorganization, including the introduction of a two-year diploma course, is being considered at Aston University in the midst of a controversial fight with the Association of University Teachers over job losses. The proposals have been drawn up by the vice-chancellor Professor Frederick Crawford, to meet the needs of the university when the full effects of the cuts imposed by the University Grants Committee last year have been felt. Aston was one of the worst-hit universities, losing 18 per cent of its income and 1,000 students by 1983/84. Among his recommendations are that lower quality courses should be improved or dropped immediately, that the widest possible variety of programmes should be offered with at least one combined honours programme being derived from each single honours programme, but common core courses be set up for groups of departments and that student/staff contact should not exceed 20 hours a week. The Association of University Teachers said this week a writ was imminent seeking a declaration that the 19-17 vote by Aston's council to authorize compulsory redundancies was a breach of the university charter. The union is advising its members

News in brief

Space experiments for Aberdeen

Three undergraduate experiments from Aberdeen University will be on board the space shuttle Columbia during a future voyage...

Brain drain study

Fears that the development of biotechnology in the United Kingdom is stunted by the number of research specialists who are taking jobs abroad...

Shortage of places

At least 8,000 sixth-formers will be unable to find places in higher education next year, if the proposed 10 per cent cut in public sector higher education is carried out...

Dialectic rejection

An extraordinary general meeting of Glasgow University's Dialectic Society has reversed a decision to appoint General Galtieri as an honorary vice president...

End further funding: CDP

by Felicity Jones The Committee of Directors of Polytechnics has agreed to press for the phasing out of further funding from local authorities to polytechnics.

The CDP decision came as a surprise to many of the 30 polytechnic directors. Dr Brian Tonge of Oxford Polytechnic, who has been calling for a reduction in further funding...

Along with Manchester and the other larger polytechnics, Newcastle believes that it has already pared its performance in unit cost terms to the bone. In a feasibility study it has, however, reluctantly singled out the equivalent of 50 staff jobs and 530 student places to go to provide the £1.3m saving necessary for a 10 per cent cut.

Universities contribute mere 5% to research

by Jon Turney Science Correspondent

Universities' direct contribution to research accounts for only about 5 per cent of the total national research and development effort, according to figures presented to a House of Lords Select Committee last week.

The figures supplied to the committee put some of the concerns about the dual support system for university research into perspective. British R and D breaks down roughly equally between government and private industry, with slightly more than half of government-backed research being for defence programmes.

The Merrison report said there was no reliable method of assessing how much university money went on research - as it depends on staff time and overheads which cover many activities.

Applications hit peak

Scottish universities have had a record number of applications this year from qualified candidates despite reduced intakes, early figures show. Pupils whose marks would have guaranteed them a place last year were being turned away.

Strathclyde, which has had to cut its intake by 200, reports a new peak of almost 17,000 applicants for 1,570 places this year. Mr David Morrell, Strathclyde's registrar, said more fully-qualified applicants than ever before had had to be rejected.

At St Andrews spokeswoman said around 200 applicants had been turned away who would have been given places last year. St Andrews had more than 6,000 applications for 820 places. Stirling had 8,800 applications for 600 places. It has reduced its intake this year by 50, but is still 50 over the total recommended by the University Grants Committee.



Twins Nigel and Barry Franks have kept Bath University's prize for the top student technologist in the family. Both are in the final year of an engineering degree and Barry (right) is seen handing over the Westland Cup he won last year to this year's winner... Nigel.

Outside payments threatened

Extra payments made to university staff for ad hoc duties like examination work and supervising postgraduate students are under threat. As more universities cut or abolish these extra payments to save money, the Inland Revenue is mounting a campaign to deduct tax from them at source at the basic rate.

Mr John Akker, the AUT's general secretary, said: "A lot of universities which pay separate fees for examinations are trying to use them as a device to reduce staff conditions of employment. We have told our branches that they should resist pressure to trade off these payments in the fight against redundancies."

Fee fixed for 'milk round'

Edinburgh will be the first British university to charge employers for the "milk round" of student interviews. The director of Edinburgh's Careers and Appointments Advisory Service, Mr Allan Bassett, said 13 firms out of a total 164 had said as a result that they would not come.

Mr Bassett said he did not envisage other universities following Edinburgh's lead but geographically isolated ones might suffer if employers became less inclined to visit them.

Tebbit warns the new universities

by Karen Gold



Tebbit: approved technical education

The new universities may find themselves left out in the cold as technical and vocational education becomes more prestigious, the Secretary of State for Employment Mr Norman Tebbit has warned.

In a speech to the Glass Manufacturers' Association Mr Tebbit observed: "Mediocre traditional academic results have been preferred to relevant technical qualifications... Indeed the second class academic has been preferred to the first class technician."

According to the Department of Employment Mr Tebbit was emphasising that he wanted the Government's new technical initiatives and courses to have a high reputation, perhaps so high that the new universities would envy it.

The steering group and the Privy Council have to approve the name and the working party feel this is a priority. Dr Froggett's letter says a name would be inappropriate because it was likely to cause confusion.

Inquiry into college sale

The Comptroller and Auditor-General is to mount a preliminary inquiry into the sale of Hamilton College, Scotland. This was revealed in a letter from the clerk of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee to local MP George Robertson.

Mr Robertson this week secured a parliamentary adjournment debate on the sale. The college, built for £2m 14 years ago, and axed by the Government last year, has just been sold for £68,000.

DES bid fails

continued from front page A campaign is unsuccessful. North-East London, Leicester and Thames polytechnics are also pressing Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education, for a further rethink.

Aston

continued from front page The cuts if the smaller number of courses and modules are carefully designed for use in a wide variety of programmes.

London scrutinizes subject areas

by Jon Turney Science Correspondent

London University has set up seven single-subject working parties to make rapid reviews of specific areas. At least a dozen more will follow soon.

The first subjects under study are Dutch, Italian, classics, geology, philosophy, pharmacy and physics. Mathematical sciences and nutrition will also begin almost immediately.

Opposition to name for polyversity

Ulster's polyversity suffered another setback this week when its choice of name brought opposition from the Queens University of Belfast. Dr Peter Froggett, vice-chancellor of Queens University, said he was disappointed that the steering group had chosen a name which was not approved by the steering group.

Other working party decisions include: proposals for a draft charter to go to the steering group next month (the charter is likely to suggest a conventional university structure with provision for non-degree work); the main academic reorganization to take place the year after the official merger, in 1985/86; and the postponement of decisions on certain inter-faculty issues including continuing education.

The Northern Ireland Department of Education has published its latest calculations on the demand for teachers, on which Education Minister, Mr Nicholas Scott, will base his decision on the province's future teacher training provision.

DES bid fails

continued from front page The DENI paper points out that flexibility in quotas will be needed in the institutions, with provision for expansion in the 1990s when demand is likely to increase. It urges more specialized courses for primary teachers, 80 per cent of whom should be trained on BEd courses and 20 per cent on PGCEs, compared with 30 per cent and 70 per cent respectively for secondary teachers.

Moneyspinner

Surrey University will start a private degree course in dance next session. The university senate has voted overwhelmingly in favour of proposals for the new course and full details will be announced shortly.

The course will be entirely fee-paying and will be the first in the university.

Dutch and Italian would be affected by the shape of Bedford and Holloway colleges after their amalgamation. The pharmacy working party would have to take account of the University Grants Committee's recommendations about the pattern of the subject nationally.

The first nine working parties will meet in early December, and report by the end of January. Each group will have an outside chair and will include the heads of colleges offering the subject concerned and a representative from each department.

The AUT will raise the terms of reference of the working parties to the university at the London joint consultative committee meeting on December 12. Both the union and student representatives are unhappy

Protest mounts over NAB's 10 per cent cut exercise

by Felicity Jones Protests, sit-ins and stormy faculty meetings have greeted initial plans to meet the 10 per cent cuts the National Advisory Board has requested before the academic board meeting on Monday.

Most hostility to the director's proposals came from the humanities, social sciences and business faculties which face the severest cuts despite Dr Law's principle of even-handedness. A joint defence committee of trade and student unions has been set up to oppose all proposed cuts, and mass meetings have been held.

Portsmouth's management studies faced a possible cut of up to ten staff and nine academic staff posts could be in the languages department. The science and engineering departments stand to escape relatively lightly with the loss of two or three staff posts.

with the tight timetable set for the reviews. Mr Chris Sale, London University students' union president, said it had hoped for more direct input to the working parties.

The external chairmen appointed so far are: Jonkheer Huydecoper, the Dutch ambassador, for Dutch; Professor Uberto Limentani, Magdalen College, Cambridge, for Italian; Sir Moses Finlay, master of Darwin College, Cambridge, for classics; Dr Alwyn Williams, vice-chancellor of Glasgow University, for geology; University Professor Ronald Dworkin, University College, Oxford, for philosophy; Mr David Smart, former director of Glaxo PLC, for pharmacy; and Sir Sam Edwards, Cambridge University, for physics.

The terms of reference state that they should take account of student opinion, look at the effects of institutional developments and mergers and make recommendations.

of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, said the proposals had been drawn up in "total secrecy" leaving only a week for consultation before the academic board meeting on Monday.

Elsewhere there has been strong reaction to the request for the NAB (in form three of its letters to the polytechnics) to give priority to courses which polytechnics would keep should a reduction in resources be less severe than expected.

At Oxford, Polytechnic, all five faculties were asked to give priority to two-thirds of their courses and so for the modern studies department has refused to cooperate. Two other faculties may follow suit.

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Fewer apply for OU's courses

Applications to the Open University for undergraduate courses in 1983 have fallen by 5 per cent, according to preliminary figures being analysed at the OU this week. The fall follows an 8 per cent increase last year, and takes applications back to the 1981 level.

The effect on different regions has varied, with the West Midlands suffering a 13 per cent drop in applications, while Northern Ireland (admissions) has increased no less than 20 per cent.

Its success, together with a small increase in the North West of England and Yorkshire, suggest that high employment has no straightforward relationship with the decline. The number of unemployed students has probably increased, though an exact figure is not yet known, according to the OU. Last year 6.8 per cent of students were unemployed, with 4,000 receiving help from a special one-year Government fund whose future is currently uncertain.

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Research scheme 'oversubscribed'

by Jon Turney
Science Correspondent

The Medical Research Council's £5m special support scheme for university research looks like being oversubscribed.

Sir James Gowans, the council's secretary, said last week that 20 groups had already made submissions for grants and the successful applicants would be chosen soon.

The scheme, announced last month, will provide £2m over five years for up to 20 groups, but the council is unlikely to commit the whole sum at once.

Introducing the MRC's 1981-82 annual report, Sir James said the scale of the rescue operation would be needed to demand, but the emphasis of the scheme was only for groups which already had substantial outside support.

All the applicants so far were MRC-backed units, but the best should always have enough money to do all they could.

He said that the number of submissions would give an indication of the state of the dual support system for university research, which the council saw as a serious problem.

Some university departmental grants for research were "derisory", he said. In the long term the council would agree strongly for money to get the dual support system back on the rails.

Away from the universities, Sir James emphasized the difficulty in finding replacement directors of the right calibre for MRC research units. The council was actively looking for new directors for its dental unit in Bristol, its pneumoconiosis unit in South Wales and its medical sociology unit in Aberdeen.

Dental research was something of



Phillip Whitehead (left) and NUS president Nell Stewart survey the empty scene

Case of the disappearing demonstration



Thousands of students marched through London last week to support their demand for a 12.4 per cent grants increase and £25 a week for all further education students.

But by the time Labour's front bench spokesman on higher education, Mr Phillip Whitehead, arrived for a rally in Hyde Park they had dispersed.

A communications breakdown largely because of the dispute involving National Union of Students staff was blamed.

"I could see the banners and the rally as I drove into the underground car park, but as I emerged at about 2.55pm I saw everyone vanishing," he said.

"I feel pretty fed up about it. I suppose I should be tactful - NUS has been a very well-organized pressure group and I hope this was an unusual lapse."

Lecturers may ask for flat-rate rise

by David Jobbins

University lecturers are to discuss whether they should seek a flat-rate pay rise next year in the face of a Government warning that 3.5 per cent is to be made available for salary increases.

The winter council of the Association of University Teachers in Bradford next month is to consider a resolution from the union's Reading branch which calls for a flat-rate increase to reduce differentials between academics at the bottom of the lecturer scale and those at the top and in promoted posts.

Support for a squeezing of differentials also comes from the union's University College London branch, which accepts that a combination of flat-rate and percentage increase - the sort of formula likely to be adopted by the public sector college union - is something union negotiators should encourage.

Dissatisfaction with the existing negotiating machinery, which led to the imposition of an arbitrary settlement this year - is to surface, with calls for a streamlined machinery and pursuit of the 1983 claim "with vigour" to ensure payment of awards from the April 1 settlement date.

But if pay is the ostensible theme of this winter council, the real discussion will be about the defence of Aston and the threat of weakened tenure protection, the pay debate may be relegated to second place.

While women's rights also appear to be an important issue on the basis of motions so far submitted, the pro-cessures which led to the appointment of Ms Diana Warwick as general secretary of the union in place of Mr Laurie Sapper, who retires next

Polys bid for share of £2m

by Felicity Jones

Twelve polytechnics have submitted their proposals for course developments in information technology following the disclosure that the Government is to provide £2m for developments in the field.

Without warning the chosen polytechnics were given ten days to put forward their tenders for the money at the invitation of the National Advisory Body which will distribute the awards as part of the advanced further education pool for 1983/4.

The decision to approach certain polytechnics, including Leicester, Teesside, Hatfield and Kingston, was made after consulting the Council for National Academic Awards and the Inspectorate. Other likely contenders for funds, such as Newcastle, were inexplicably left off the list although the polytechnic is a major centre for micro-electronics.

A decision will probably be taken at the next NAB board meeting in December on the new courses to be recommended to the Secretary of State to start next year. In its letter, NAB said that priority should be given to one-year postgraduate conversion courses, higher certificate TEC courses at technician level, two year (OND) courses for 18+ entry and first degree courses.

Although the financial boost has been generally welcomed at the official close of Information Technology Year (the year is being extended for another six months), it is considered to be little more than a drop in the ocean. Dr Phillip Mars, assistant director at Leicester Polytechnic and a visiting professor at Yale University said there was a "desperate" need for more courses to meet short-term needs and future longer term developments.

Leicester has tendered for £500,000 worth of new courses requiring 11 new members of staff in an ambitious proposal aimed at developing a "global awareness".

Teesside Polytechnic's deputy director Dr Colin Webster said that substantially more investment would be needed.

ILEA sets up youth conference

Concern about youth unemployment has prompted the Inner London Education Authority to set up a standing conference on education and employment. According to Mr Roy Davies the authority's leader, the idea is to "underline our commitment to the careers service remaining as a vital part of the education service."

Mr Alyn Davies, chief inspector for further, higher and community education in the area, said that although the authority's further education service ran an extraordinarily wide range of courses, totalling some 15,000, it would be hard to hold them in equilibrium while the new youth training programme was introduced. In a warning of strains ahead he said: "Schools and colleges might have learned a lot about co-operation and bridging courses but there is a sort of armed truce between schools and colleges."

Miss Catherine Avent, the authority's senior inspector for careers guidance, made an appeal for more help for young people in further education. "The loss of guaranteed secure employment meant that, careers tutors must take on much greater responsibility."



Former Middlesex Polytechnic student Sandra Locker poses on a sofa designed for her degree course but now to be included in the Design Council's forthcoming exhibition, The Young Creators. The exhibition, sponsored by Lloyds Bank, is aimed at encouraging commercial and industrial awareness in schools and colleges. Sandra Locker, who left Middlesex this summer, now works for a small furniture company in London and was responsible for furnishing the offices of Channel 4.

Caribbean course proposed

by Karen Gold

Proposals for a centre for Caribbean studies at Goldsmiths' College, London, have gone to the Department of Education and Science and various educational trusts, in the hope of attracting funds for what would be the first multi-level centre in the country.

The proposals suggest two initial appointments within the college to encourage the development of existing courses and the establishment of new ones, to link postgraduate students who have an interest in the Caribbean and to set up a resource centre with an informal starting date within two academic years.

The idea for such a centre came from a group of academics within Goldsmiths'. A year ago they invited representatives of mainly black community groups and interested individuals to join them, and the new joint steering group then embarked on widespread consultations in the community. The proposals come from the steering group, with the support of Goldsmiths' administration according to group chairman and senior lecturer Ms Olivia Harris.

Reaction from the community in New Cross and elsewhere to the proposals, which provide for three levels of study (adult education classes, diploma and postgraduate) and draw on a range of subjects established at Goldsmiths' (music, art, history, social sciences, literature and education) has been enthusiastic, she says.

Already the adult studies programme includes a steel-band class for trainee teachers, an African history course and a Caribbean workshop which holds discussions and invites outside speakers. The proposals offer an increase in such classes, with resource materials on the Caribbean being made available in south-east London for the first time.

A diploma course would be more inclusive, probably focussing on Caribbean culture and history with particular reference to experiences in Britain, according to Ms Harris. Postgraduate work at Goldsmiths' would begin by bringing together existing students who are scattered in different departments.

Class sizes rise as public sector enrolments soar

by Felicity Jones

Classes at polytechnics and colleges increased substantially in size last year as student enrolments soared and the number of courses increased only marginally, according to the annual report of the Council for National Academic Awards.

The average first-year enrolment on courses leading to first degrees was nearly 43 students per course compared with 38 the previous year. This was the result of a 16.5 per cent rise in student enrolments, higher even than the previous peak period of growth in 1977 of 15.3 per cent.

The growth in student numbers affected most subjects but particularly science and technology which registered an 18.9 per cent increase in enrolments. Only education courses showed a drop although there was a steady increase in the number of full-time education students.

However, the number of degree courses in operation increased by only 34, reflecting a comparative decline in the development of new undergraduate courses and corresponding educational opportunities for students. A greater emphasis on part-time courses means they now represent nearly 20 per cent of the total.

The total of first degree awards rose by over 34,000 in 1981 in comparison with the 22,000 awards made the previous year. A situation which Dr Edwin Kerr, the CNAAs' chief officer thought reflected the larger intake and number of courses.

Dr Kerr said this had been an important transitional year for the council with the setting up of the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education. Looking ahead, he thought that the relationship with the NAB was the most important issue still to be resolved, although he did not think it likely the matter would be worked out for several months.

Sir Alastair Pilkington was to take over as chairman of the council in January 1984. Sir Keith Joseph, the education secretary, has announced. Educated at Sherborne School and Trinity College Cambridge, he is a past chairman and current director of Pilkington glass company.

New members of the council have also been announced. They include Mr Christopher Ball, chairman of the NAB board, Dr Norbert Singer, Thames polytechnic's director and Mr John Stoddart, director of Hull College of Higher Education.

Expanding further education sector still 'under threat'

Further education seems to be the only bright spot in education as it has more money, students and staff, but in fact it is under threat from all directions, according to Mr George Stewart, the new president of the Scottish Further Education Association.

The Manpower Services Commission was regarded by many as the saviour of further education but it could prove to be the greatest threat, Mr Stewart said at the association's annual meeting.

"The MSC is planning to put 460,000 young people through the youth training scheme in 1983 and you may think that this is bound to be good for further education," he said.

"I don't think we should be misled as to the objectives of the scheme. The youth training scheme is simply a convenient method by which the Government can hide the true extent of unemployment. At the end of the year, three out of every five who are involved in the scheme can once again join the unemployment queue."

Mr Stewart added: "There is also the danger that the Government,

Open College is popular

An attempt to provide comprehensive post-school education in London has attracted thousands of enquiries in its first year.

The Open College of South London is the first programme of courses from basic to higher education for those who want to return to education but do not have formal qualifications.

Previously the "access" and "second chance" courses run by adult education institutes and colleges have given mature students a route into higher education but on a limited scale.

The Open College is based on Murley, Southwark, Vauxhall and South London Colleges, Lambeth and Southwark adult education institutes, in cooperation with the Polytechnic of South Bank which is co-ordinating the courses.

Mr Roger Jinkinson, chairman of the Open College and head of the polytechnic's extra faculty unit said that over 3,000 enquiries had been received and all the courses were now full. He thought the decision to publicize the courses was what boosted the response.

There was no guarantee they would be taken up.

The report also points out that none of the other funding bodies share the SSRC's commitment to integration of different social science approaches - from sociology, psychology, criminology, anthropology, epidemiology and economics.

Professor Griffith Edwards of the Institute of Psychiatry, chaired the panel which wrote the report. He said this week that social scientists had not taken drug problems seriously up to now.

"It gives notice of the intention of social scientists to try and tackle very difficult social problems, though without promising that if we get the money we will necessarily provide solutions," he said.

Addiction study gets £350,000

The Social Science Research Council will spend £350,000 in the next five years on research into addiction.

This follows a report on the best ways of tackling abuse of drink, tobacco and drugs. All the money will go to one research group which has yet to be chosen and will start work next year.

The report, *Research Priorities in Addiction*, concludes that interdisciplinary research into drug problems is essential to improve understanding of drug abuse in its social context.

Although it was prepared last year, it provides some answers to more recent criticisms of the worth of SSRC-sponsored research. The report stresses that new research could suggest other ways of dealing with drug problems more effectively, but

Teachers fear for quality of youth training scheme

by Olga Wojtas
Scottish Correspondent

Scotland's largest teaching union says it is disturbed by developments in Government's Youth Training Scheme, and has warned other unions that they should question them.

In a paper sent to MPs, local authorities and the Scottish TUC, the further education branch of the Educational Institute of Scotland reiterates its support for the youth training scheme in principle, but says insufficient notice has been taken of Employment Secretary Mr Norman Tebbit's remarks that the scheme's costs should not rise as a result of the increase of the level of trainee allowances.

The emphasis on YTS has been on quality, says the EIS, clearly distinguishable from the Youth Opportunities Programme which in many cases was "little more than work experience and in some cases mere job substitution."

However, says the union, quality may well be sacrificed to cope with the rise in trainee allowances within an already determined budget. "One of the major guarantees of quality education: this is, however, expensive, and therefore very vulnerable to our 'cash limit' policy."

The Scottish Education Department has said that further education colleges in the scheme would have a limit of £50,000 in additional resources. The EIS describes this as "provide a wooden hut".

The union also criticizes the decision of YTS between schemes sponsored by industry and those run by local authorities. "This will mean first and second-class provision instead of a comprehensive scheme for all 16-year-olds, it says.

If the scheme is to stay within budget, it adds, 60 per cent of places must be sponsored by industry, and employers will use these as a one-year probation period for youngsters, selecting the most suitable for continued employment.

While the Manpower Services Commission is in theory supervising employers by its own admission it could not prevent widespread abuse of the Youth Opportunities Programme, says the EIS.

"Some employers will no doubt be concerned to provide young people with a general foundation for working life, and will not be concerned with making a profit out of the exercise. Others, we are afraid, will be concerned only with training in its narrowest sense."

But the situation will be worse for youngsters who fail to win a place on industry sponsored schemes and are offered local authority ones, the union claims. They will have "already experienced failure at school and will now enter a scheme conscious that they have been rejected as even being possibly likely to get jobs at 17. One can well imagine the mood in which they will approach their year of, in their eyes, largely hopeless training."

The needs of industry should not be paramount to YTS, but the need of trainees to be helped to cope without work.

"This is not to argue against the concept of vocational preparation, but against what seems more and more an exclusively job-training aspect to YTS," says the report.

Schools warned of housing crisis

Students at the Polytechnic of North London are writing to schools and colleges warning sixth-formers about the chronic shortage of accommodation at the poly.

PNL, in densely populated Islington and Camden, has only 410 rooms in its halls of residence between its 4,500 students. The accommodation service is limited to distributing lists of property owned by local private landlords.

Students' union official, Mr John Leatham, said the private rented sector had been declining for some years.

The students argue that empty "short life" property from local authorities and housing associations should be made available to them as should be made at other colleges. In has been done at other colleges. In Nottingham and Newcastle 500 students are housed by the local authority in each area. In Manchester 1,200 students are housed in this way.

The Polytechnic of North London authorities have so far refused to pay for staff to manage any such schemes and the students union says this has led to offers of housing by local housing associations being turned down. Students at the poly claim that the directorate has dismissed the idea of buying property on grounds of cost.

An NUS report on student housing identified the Polytechnic of North London as having 500 homeless students in September and October 1981, 10 per cent of the total and are encouraging colleges to push for better housing provision and say that college authorities should accept responsibility for providing accommodation, be it either directly or indirectly.

John Leatham said: "We are particularly angry that the poly gives the impression in its literature that accommodation is available to new students." They intend to leaflet

Employers use computer to pick up data

Computerized course information will help to get the Government's PICKUP (Professional, Industrial and Commercial Updating) scheme off the ground.

The Department of Education and Science has commissioned a private firm, Guildford Educational Services, to design a £250,000 information system. It will be available for limited use by next April and self-supporting by September.

The system will initially sort and store details of up to 20,000 courses - including place, cost and duration - for employers wanting to provide updating for their workforce.

So far there have been three regional meetings designed to bring colleges and local industry together under the PICKUP umbrella. A second regional development agent has been appointed to cover the North-West. He is Mr David Esther, a former industrial training and personnel officer and open access programme manager in the North West Regional Management Centre.

But colleges will have to make extra efforts to capture and hold the interest of employers. Mr William Shelton, state for education in charge of PICKUP, warned at a conference organized by SCEDSIP (the Standing Conference on Education Development Services in Polytechnics) in Wolverhampton.

"Cooperation with the customer is needed throughout the process, from discovering what it is he requires to final delivery of the product," he said. "Often, what the customer ultimately wants will be rather different from what he initially may think he needs."

Teachers in colleges, polytechnics and universities must be prepared to work unusual hours and to teach in the workplace if necessary, he said.

Twenty projects which will develop new teaching methods and curriculum packages for PICKUP have been commissioned by the Government's Further Education and Curriculum Development Unit, including a handbook.

April 1986

THES reporters look at arbiters of standards in the fields of business and technical education,

Students' attitude an aid in evaluating courses

Students are inveterate complainers. They have a tendency to criticize rather than to praise, to find fault sometimes where none exists or is inevitable.

General grouches about boring lectures and irrelevant courses are the very stuff of coffee bar conversations. But rarely are specific criticisms raised directly and formally with the university or college authorities.

This is something the NUS is eager to change, if only because the chances of a successful academic appeal against assessment on such grounds is unlikely to succeed.

Most institutions restrict the grounds for appeal to three general areas - extenuating circumstances relating to health or for example bereavement, a technical breakdown during assessment (for example faulty equipment in a practical examination) and that the student to be aware of the consequences of failure.

Self-validation means that university appeals procedures - where they exist - are fully internal. NUS, which has been pressing for some form of uniform national appeals procedure, is deeply dissatisfied with this state of affairs, and latched on to the Nottingham case in an effort to secure one.

Its other line of approach has been to explore whether there is a contractual relationship between a student and the university or college, and whether damages may be sought if the student believes there has been a breach, for example if teaching has been inadequate.

The consistent attitude taken by the courts has been that while internal procedures exist to deal with grievances there is no remedy at law. Specifically, courts have pointed out that the university visitor, almost always the Queen.

Many students are deterred by this lengthy and uncertain process. But NUS now believes it stands a good chance of what its director of legal services, solicitor Mr Michael Mawle, describes as "breaching the dyke".

A case soon to be tested in the courts is of a Turkish postgraduate student who has been refused his degree because his research was not regarded as original.

The significance for NUS is that if its case succeeds, a chink in the medieval armour surrounding the universities may have been opened which could be exploited in cases involving home and undergraduate students with grievances over the quality of the education they have received.

Even if there is not found to be a contractual liability, NUS believes it could argue that universities have a common law obligation to act with care for their members. Courts have previously held that the charters and articles of universities confer on them the status of self-ordering societies free from external interference which students and staff are free to join.

Assessing the assessors in the OU's

The Open University's predicament, taking on students assuming no acquaintance with formal study of their subject, selling and broadcasting material to vast numbers of the general public, relying on the vagaries of the postal service, is reminiscent of Dr Johnson's woman preacher or dog on hind legs: even if it's not done well, one is surprised to find it done at all.

It is done well of course: the soaring prestige of the OU from its earliest days has been founded not only on confidence in its graduates' academic achievements, but on public admiration of their moral fibre, bearers of a Churchillian heritage of success against all the odds.

The OU runs about 140 undergraduate courses at present, and a small but expanding number of post-graduate and continuing education ones. Each course has a statutory life of not less than four years and, unless extended by senate, not more than 10. Each year around 20 new courses are introduced.

A student takes six courses for a pass degree, eight for honours. Each course consists of 36 units, plus radio and television programmes. In any one year, between 400 and 450 units will be in production, most though far from all of them written by OU staff.

Both the individual and overall assessors are looking, according to Len Haynes, "to see that the course has a reasonable balance, and contains material you would expect to see at this level; to see that there are no gaps and no overcommitment."

The merger of the Business and Technician Education Councils next year will mark the final stage of a revolution in rationalizing and improving quality in both fields, which was set in motion by the Haslegrave report in 1969.

Merger could create powerful

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By merging, the two councils will become a powerful force in further education, validating courses for over 500,000 students in some 500 colleges. Both are financially independent drawing their incomes from registration fees and anticipate a healthy surplus which jointly could be in the region of £1m.

Both councils say it is too early to judge what impact the merger will have on the quality of their courses. But they acknowledge that improvements can be made and they have a great deal to learn from each other.

Mr John Sellars, the chief officer of the Business Education Council says that BTEC as the new council is to be called ought to be able to provide both young and older students with a blend of technical, financial and administrative backgrounds which will be invaluable in adjusting to the needs of the new world.

Mr Frank Fidgeon, the deputy officer of the Technician Education Council says it is not so much a question of quality control as one of quality assurance. In education he believes one should try and implement some of the good practices in industry.

Neither of the council's efforts in improving and monitoring quality have escaped criticisms though. The highest has come from the college staff which has complained that the newly introduced courses, often without sufficient time, support and resources from the colleges or local authorities.

force

Professional scientific institutions' involvement in quality control ranges from almost complete reliance on academic institutions' own standards to taking complete responsibility for course content and examinations.

Science takes own measure. The Institute of Physics has decided to phase out its own graduation exam in 1984. The institute has been designed in us well as the knowledge and skills required for the job.

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course creation department

team chairman, the faculty dean and - a new safeguard this - to the pro vice chancellor. If approved, the course then goes into production with no further scrutiny apart from editorial checks for legal fitness.

All well and good. But with both unit and course assessors all nominated by the course team and only scrutinized by the pro vice chancellor, who cannot know the status or peccadilloes of the assessors?

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science, the Open University and the reactions of students

to personal teaching are likely to be hard-won, is most apparent here: in summer schools tutors are swapped around every few days to provide an escape route for possible personality clashes.

There is no question that students are other than satisfied with their courses; a survey at summer schools this year with a question on bias attracted not a single complaint. Nevertheless, following a letter from the Department of Education and Science to the OU drawing complaints about four courses - two of them already closed - to their notice, a review of validation procedures was begun.

So far, apart from the extra copy of the course assessor's final report to the pro vice chancellor and a circular to all departments asking them to check that procedures are being followed, the only changes have been issuing of formal contracts to unit assessors instead of the previous letters of invitation, ensuring that the course assessor is appointed as early as possible and thereby provides a consistent overall view, and consideration of more frequent and formal assessor reports.

But to murmurs within the DES that there should be more material from outside the OU in its courses, both to save money and guard against bias, both Len Haynes and vice chancellor Dr John Horlock point out that although they might expand such input for post-graduate courses - where they were sure students knew how to study - and continuing education, neither the material nor the format exists for more extensive use by undergraduates than happens at present.

Dr Horlock added: "I am astonished by this, because the DES can't have realized what we already do. If you look at the number of people we already use from outside - it's enormous."

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